

WHAT VAUDEVILLE KILLED

Every evening at eight and at ten
the Great Wantondo did it again.
A flourish of cape, a tap of wand.
Both cage and sweet singing bird were gone.

Oh, Great Wantondo, I could never guess
where you hid that bird.
The cage could fold up, hang under your coat,
but the bird -- the bird was alive.
You made sure we'd seen that.

Oh, Great Wantondo, may you saute in Hell.
May your body be pressed
in the vise of despair. The bird that vanished
into the air smashed flat with a snap
when the cage snapped flat. Replaced
with another in every act.

Evil Wantondo, do you still wander
from town to town, buying canaries as you go?
Oh, Great Wantondo, may you be squeezed
quite flat by the thighs of fate
at eight and at ten. Two deaths daily
and a matinee Wednesday.

CARPENTER'S APPRENTICE

"You can tell a carpenter by his chips,"
he said. I wasn't sure if I should judge
by quantity, measure waste, or seek
smooth edges, the blessing of sharp tools.
Or did he mean those blond ringlets
writhing at the plane's throat were signs
we left behind so when the aliens
came they'd know what we had done here?

Which seemed to be too much philosophy
when all I wanted was a piece of board
"about so long." He showed me how
to mark the edge, pull back the saw
to start the cut. Then threw in the bit
about the carpenter and his chips.

-- Robert M. Chute

Poland Spring ME